

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An absorbent garment for personal wear about the wearer's waist, said absorbent garment comprising:
  - an absorbent assembly constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer, the absorbent assembly having an inner surface adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body, an outer surface, a front waist region, a back waist region, a crotch region extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region and the back waist region, a front waist end and a back waist end; and
    - a garment shell configured for encircling the wearer's waist, said garment shell having a front waist region, a front waist end at said front waist region, a back waist region, and a back waist end at said back waist region, the absorbent assembly being disposed generally within the garment shell, and
      - a waist belt configured for wear about the wearer's waist, the absorbent assembly being releasably attached generally at the front and back waist regions thereof to the waist belt, the garment shell being attached generally at the front and back waist regions of said garment shell to the waist belt whereby the front waist region of the garment shell is in opposed relationship with the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and the back waist region of the garment shell is in opposed relationship with the back waist region of the absorbent assembly.
2. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the garment shell is releasably attached to the waist belt generally at the front and back waist regions of said garment shell.

3. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein  
the absorbent assembly is releasably attached generally at  
the front and back waist ends of said absorbent assembly to  
the waist belt, the garment shell being attached generally at  
5 the front and back waist ends of said garment shell to the  
waist belt.

4. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein  
the absorbent assembly further comprises at least one  
fastening component disposed at the front waist region of the  
absorbent assembly and adapted for releasable attachment to  
5 the waist belt, and at least one other fastening component  
disposed at the back waist region of the absorbent assembly  
and adapted for releasable attachment to the waist belt.

5. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 4 wherein  
the at least one fastening component at the front waist  
region of the absorbent assembly is a hook fastener and the  
at least one fastening component at the back waist region of  
5 the absorbent assembly is a hook fastener, the waist belt  
being at least in part constructed of a loop material adapted  
for releasable attachment to said hook fasteners.

6. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein  
the waist belt has an inner surface and an outer surface, the  
garment shell being attached to the outer surface of the  
waist belt, the absorbent assembly being attached to the  
5 inner surface of the waist belt.

7. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein  
the waist belt has an end portion which overlaps a portion of  
the waist belt other than said end portion upon extending  
about the wearer's waist, said end portion being adapted for  
5 releasable attachment to said other portion of the waist belt  
to secure the waist belt on the wearer's waist.

8. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 7 wherein the overlapping end portion of the waist belt has at least one fastening component thereon, said at least one fastening component being adapted for releasable attachment to said  
5 other portion of the waist belt.

9. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 8 wherein the at least one fastening component comprises at least one hook fastener, the waist belt being constructed at least in part of a loop material capable of releasable attachment to  
5 the at least one hook fastener.

10. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the waist belt has an unstretched length, said waist belt being stretchable along at least a portion of the unstretched length of the belt.

11. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 10 wherein the waist belt is stretchable to a length in the range of about 120 percent to about 200 percent of the unstretched length of said waist belt.

12. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the waist belt has a width in the range of about 6 mm to about 80 mm.

13. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has at least one outer leg opening, the absorbent garment also having a pair of inner leg openings separate from the outer leg opening and disposed  
5 within the garment shell, the absorbent assembly at least in part defining said inner leg openings, said garment shell defining said at least one outer leg opening.

14. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 13 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to provide an

elastic fit of the absorbent assembly against the wearer's legs at the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment, the 5 garment shell being configured to generally hang loose about the wearer's legs at the at least one outer leg opening of the absorbent garment.

15. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 13 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to encircle the legs of the wearer and fully defines the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

16. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 13 wherein the garment shell further has a crotch region extending longitudinally between the front and back waist regions of the garment shell, the crotch region of the 5 garment shell at least in part defining a pair of outer leg openings of the absorbent garment which are separate from the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

17. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 16 wherein the crotch region of the absorbent assembly is free from attachment to the crotch region of the garment shell.

18. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has a waist opening, the front and back waist ends of the absorbent assembly at least in part defining the waist opening of the absorbent garment.

19. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 18 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to encircle the waist of the wearer generally at the front and back waist ends of the absorbent assembly to fully define the waist 5 opening of the absorbent garment.

20. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 19 wherein the absorbent assembly is a brief-style absorbent assembly.

21. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the garment shell has a configuration selected from the group comprising shorts, skorts, skirts and swim trunks.

22. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has a waist opening, at least one outer leg opening, and laterally opposite side seams extending generally from the waist opening to said at least one outer leg opening, the absorbent garment being  
5 refastenable along at least a portion of each of said side seams.

23. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 22 wherein the absorbent garment is permanently closed along another portion of each of said side seams.

24. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 23 wherein the refastenable portion of each side seam extends generally from the at least one leg opening of the absorbent garment to a terminal point intermediate the at least one leg opening and the waist opening, said permanently closed portion of each side seam extending from said terminal point of the refastenable portion to the waist opening of the absorbent garment.  
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25. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 22 wherein the garment shell comprises a front panel assembly having laterally opposite side margins and a back panel assembly having corresponding laterally opposite side margins, the front panel assembly being in generally overlapping relationship with the back panel assembly at the  
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side margins of said front and back panel assemblies whereby  
the overlapped side margins generally define the side seams  
of the absorbent garment, the side margins being releasably  
10 attached to each other along at least a portion of a length  
of said side margins to define the refastenable portion of  
the side seams of the absorbent garment.

26. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 22  
wherein the side seams of the absorbent garment are  
refastenable along the full length of the side seams from the  
waist opening of the absorbent garment to the at least one  
5 outer leg opening thereof.

27. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 15  
wherein the absorbent assembly has laterally opposite outer  
edges at the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and  
corresponding laterally opposite outer edges at the back  
5 waist region of the absorbent assembly, the front and back  
waist regions of the absorbent assembly being attached to  
each other generally at the respective outer edges of the  
front and back waist regions whereby the front and back waist  
regions of the absorbent assembly together with the crotch  
10 region of the absorbent assembly encircle the wearer's legs  
and define the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

28. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 27  
wherein the front and back waist regions of the absorbent  
assembly are releasably attached at the respective outer  
edges of said front and back waist regions.

29. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 15  
wherein the absorbent assembly further comprises a pair of  
laterally opposite front side panels extending outward of the  
absorbent assembly generally at the front waist region on  
5 laterally opposite sides thereof, and a pair of laterally

opposite back side panels extending outward of the absorbent assembly generally at the back waist region on laterally opposite sides thereof, each of the front side panels being attached to a corresponding one of the back side panels such 10 that the front and back side panels together with the crotch region of the absorbent assembly together fully define the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

30. An absorbent assembly as set forth in claim 29 wherein each of the front side panels of the absorbent assembly is releasably attached to a corresponding one of the back side panels of the absorbent assembly.

31. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 30 wherein the garment shell comprises a front panel assembly having laterally opposite side margins and a back panel assembly having corresponding laterally opposite side 5 margins, the front panel assembly being releasably attached to the back panel assembly generally at the respective side margins thereof.

32. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has laterally opposite front side margins and corresponding laterally opposite back side margins, the front side margins and the back side margins 5 being in overlapping relationship with each other to define laterally opposite side seams of the absorbent garment, the amount of overlap of the front side margins with the back side margins being in the range of about 0.1 inches (2.5 mm) to about 6 inches (152.4 mm).

33. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 32 wherein the amount of overlap of the front side margins with the back side margins is in the range of about 0.5 inches (12.7 mm) to about 3 inches (76.2 mm).

34. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly comprises a liquid permeable liner defining the inner surface of the absorbent assembly adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer, an outer cover in generally opposed relationship with the liner and defining the outer surface of the absorbent assembly, and an absorbent body disposed between the liner and the outer cover.

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35. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 34 wherein the outer cover of the absorbent assembly is liquid impermeable and the garment shell is liquid permeable.

36. A method for placing an absorbent garment on a wearer's waist, said method comprising:

extending a waist belt about the wearer's waist such that an overlapping end portion of the belt overlaps an 5 underlying portion of the belt;

releasably attaching the overlapping end portion of the belt to the underlying portion of said belt to secure the belt on the wearer's waist;

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releasably attaching an absorbent assembly to said waist belt, the absorbent assembly being constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer, the absorbent assembly having an outer surface and an inner surface adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body, said absorbent assembly further having a front waist region, a 15 back waist region, a crotch region extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region and the back waist region, a front waist end at said front waist region and a back waist end at said back waist region; and

attaching a garment shell to the waist belt, the 20 absorbent assembly being configured for being disposed within the garment shell, said garment shell having a front waist

region adapted for generally opposed relationship with the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and a back waist region adapted for generally opposed relationship with the  
25 back waist region of the absorbent assembly.

37. A method as set forth in claim 36 wherein the step of attaching the garment shell to the waist belt comprises releasably attaching the garment shell to the waist belt.

38. A method as set forth in claim 36 wherein the step of attaching the garment shell to the waist belt is conducted prior to the step of attaching the absorbent assembly to said waist belt.

39. A method as set forth in claim 36 wherein the step of attaching the garment shell to the waist belt is conducted prior to the step of extending the waist belt about the wearer's waist.

40. A method as set forth in claim 36 wherein the garment shell comprises a front panel assembly having laterally opposite side margins and a back panel assembly having corresponding laterally opposite side margins, the  
5 method further comprising the step of releasably attaching the side margins of the front and back panel assemblies together.

41. A method as set forth in claim 36 wherein the waist belt has an inner surface and an outer surface, the step of  
10 attaching the garment shell to the waist belt comprising attaching the garment shell to said outer surface of the waist belt, the step of releasably attaching the absorbent assembly to the waist belt comprising releasably attaching the absorbent assembly to one of the inner and the outer  
15 surface of the waist belt.